

Introduction: What you see now is always the fruit of what was sown in the past.

This is the fruit of a culture that has drunk darkness to the dregs.

Unfortunately, recent events have become typical challenges that we face as a nation. You combine that with a global virus that has shut down the economy, people cooped up in their homes.

And what does all this pressure reveal? (1) Just how deeply fractured our culture is. (2) It reveals that when a culture has drunk this deep and this long of the darkness—nothing can hold them together, not even a 200 yr. old document in the National Archives.

IT has also revealed that there are things more important than a vaccine. Common decency things.

- Like justice and a measured response.
- Mercy
- Compassion
- Forgiveness
- Protesting without Resorting to Anarchy.

These values are in short supply—because they're not supplied by the **industries** and **institutions** of our nation. They are supplied by the community of faith that is saved by the cross and shaped after the cross.

We offer the world what it cannot get anywhere else. They can't get it from the entertainment industry; not from their political activism, not from the university systems—not in a science or research lab—our nation needs something it can't get anywhere else. **We've heard a lot of superficial diagnoses in the media as to what the problem really is.**

In the midst of all this, we are called to be empathetic truth-tellers: These deep fractures will persist and get worse, until our people turn and surrender to the one true, living God.

Peter is going to tell us what that is.

1 Peter 1:20-25

He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was revealed in these last times for you. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Since you have purified yourselves by your obedience to the truth, so that you show sincere brotherly love for each other, from a pure heart love one another constantly, ²³ because you have been born again—not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For **All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like a flower of the grass. The grass**

withers, and the flower falls,²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures forever. And this word is the gospel that was proclaimed to you.

First, Peter tells us about

1. God's patient plan. Christ, God's eternal Son, foreknown—before creation itself. **Creation is the theater of his glory, and the story of mankind unfolds from the crowning glory of god-likeness, the fall from grace and the descent into maddening idolatry.** Leaving the human being in bondage to sin, enslaved to his appetites and prideful pursuits, in need of rescue, resurrection, and new purpose.

And God was patient to wait until that day when Christ would be revealed. **Population statistics tell us that of all the people who have ever lived on earth, 98% have lived after the time of Christ. God's timing is never off. Mercy is never late for the repentant.**

He didn't appear too early, or too late—but in the fullness of time, Christ appeared and was revealed so that the Gospel would be carried down the corridors of human history, into all the world.

2. These last days.

He states that Jesus was revealed “in these last times” or last days. Peter tells us in his first sermon, recorded in Acts 2 that when the Spirit was poured out, the last days commenced, **“And it will be in the last days, says God, that I will pour out my Spirit on all people” (Acts 2:17).**

The sobering thought is that we have been living in the end times for two thousand years.

Folks, I believe that every single day is evidence we are living on borrowed time. So let me give you three Scriptures you should keep in your back pocket until the day Christ returns to consummate and end the end times.

Matthew 24:29-31 “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.³⁰ Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.³¹ And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

- The **cosmic signs are literary not literal**. These same signs are said to accompany YHWH's coming in destruction of Babylon and other ancient nations—but in reality those nations changed hands through military incursion. This language is the prophet's way of saying, "what's the most dramatic imagery I could give you to communicate to you that you're going to be on the wrong side of God's judgment?"
- **The sign of the Son of Man is the Son of Man** who comes with great power and glory. This is Dan. 7—the Son of Man who ascends to the Ancient of Days to receive all power and glory and worship of the nations.
- **The angels harvesting the earth** and gathering the elect—believers throughout the earth who will be gathered to Christ.

Another passage that parallels Jesus's Matt. 24 discourse is...

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 "We do not want you to be **uninformed**, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. Don't you feel the culture the world in grief today? But a grief with no hope.

¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, through Jesus, ***God will bring with him*** those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For we say this to you **by a word from the Lord**: We who are still alive at the Lord's coming will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Christ will return with the deceased saints—they will rise first and this is what Revelation calls "the first resurrection."

¹⁷ Then **we** who are still alive, who are left, will be **caught up** (snatch up, seize away) together with them in the clouds to **meet** **(Matt. 25, Acts 28)** the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. The people of God who haven't died at that time will be caught up to meet Christ and the resurrected saints—1 Cor. 15 tells us our bodies will be immediately transformed from perishable to imperishable.

¹⁸ ***Therefore encourage one another with these words.***" This is supposed to be an encouraging message, not one that stresses us out. Something we look forward to.

The ambiguity of the sequence of events keeps the discussion alive. So long as we are not dividing over our theories, we are free to disagree and sharpen each other as we inquire, seek, and study it out.

Since we have been sanctified by our obedience to the truth of his Gospel. Because we have been born again into a living hope—not with perishable but through the Word of God which is enduring and everlasting...

3. Practice brotherly love.

The Danger of Group-think and Sameness. When we demand that others think like us in non-essential matters; When we demand that they conform to our image and likeness instead of leading and encouraging them to conform to Jesus's image and likeness—we run the risk of limiting our influence for the Gospel of his Kingdom.

Diversity is a good thing not a bad thing. God created us different, God uses and works through those differences to inhabit every culture in every place in the world.

The Gospel doesn't remove our distinctiveness, it simply obliterates those distinctions as walls of hostility between us. As barriers of fellowship.

Practicing brotherly love means that we celebrate the enormous diversity that God has built into the human experience. And contrary to the need to conform everyone to our little cult of group-think and sameness—the Gospel actually flourishes in diverse conditions.

What about Galatians 3:28 which says **“There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus.”** Doesn't this passage prove that Jesus has obliterated all diversity? No. Let's read the whole context.

Gal. 3:27-29 “For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. ²⁸ There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise.”

The context is that those who are baptized into Christ are now the people of God. And the social and racial barriers that existed among Jews and Greeks, male and female and slave and free—are no longer barriers to being counted as God's people—children of Abraham. He's telling them “You don't need to be conformed to being a Jew to be a Christian.”

Illus. First trip to Belize. It became clear to me within the first hour at the camp that we were not there to convert them to our culture. But to make disciples of Jesus in their culture. **We were not there to export our way of life, we were there to export our Gospel—so that all men, regardless of their ethnicity, their nationality, their local customary quirkiness—could be saved from sin, from the coming judgment and become God's children.**

Series: God of All Grace

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The Dangers of Division. When the celebration of diversity turns into divisiveness, and superficial tribalism, now we got a problem.

The one thing that binds us all together (in all of our glorious diversity) is the cross of Jesus. The only offense to the Gospel should be the cross. The only barrier to Jesus should be the cross and his truth.

Brotherly love celebrates the great diversity that God himself has built into the human experience. There's nothing unspiritual or unchristian about us gathering together around essentials while sharing differences of opinions over non-essentials.

Brotherly love does not use "diversity" as a cover to divide people into unholy factions.

The Christian Church of Jesus the Messiah is the one place on earth where people from all languages, races, ethnicities and customs can experience a true brotherhood. A genuine fellowship.

4. Live with urgency. He finishes this text off by saying, our lives are fleeting, like grass that withers, and in the heat, like flowers that fade.

Illus. We all just came out of a very long, difficult winter season. That was punctuated with a killer virus that has caused us to be locked in our homes, to cancel our vacations. Just Depressing. Miserable.

A few weeks ago the trees we planted last year began to flower in our yard and bloom and like you, we so enjoy the greening of this brown barren landscape.

And on any given day, after work, on the weekends, you can catch me working like a man on fire in my yard. Because, I know, the days are short. This season is passing, and the time is urgent. Winter will be here again before you know it and the beauty I've worked so hard to create and curate will fade. It'll be gone.

The impermanence of the times demands urgency of effort.

Life is passing, people are dying, and we too will ultimately succumb to that fate. Our human lives are cursed with transience; impermanency—life is thatch in my lawn—I power rake it and the south wind blows it down the street. The time is short and Christ comes soon. And the days or short.

When I look in our culture I see a world that used to be green with the truth. A verdant landscape of God's Word—plentiful and abundant. And now I think see a world fading like passing away and the time is urgent.

In light of the fact that God has saved and purified us from sin through Christ; that God has charged us to unite over the essentials and not to divide over non-essentials—to celebrate diversity and not divide into factions. In light of the urgency of the hour—the season is closing, the time is short—Jesus is returning.

You and I are called to exemplify the hope, exemplify the brotherly love that is sorely missing in our world—and do it all with a sense of urgency. Christ is returning, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearance of our great God and Savior Jesus.

Takeaways:

- 1. Find those who are lost and hurting and build a bridge of friendship to them.** As empathetic truth-tellers.
- 2. Tell them the good news of salvation in Christ alone.**
 - Give them the bad news—our sin has left us estranged from our Heavenly Father, it has left us judged and condemned to an eternity without God.
 - Give them the good news—Jesus died for the forgiveness of sins that we might be reconciled to God. Jesus rose from the dead that he might defeat the permeance of death.
- 3. Bring them into the fold.** Bring the new disciple into the community where there is real grieving hope, and real fellowship and brotherhood—a family saved by the cross, and shaped by the cross.

Go Find, Tell, and Bring.